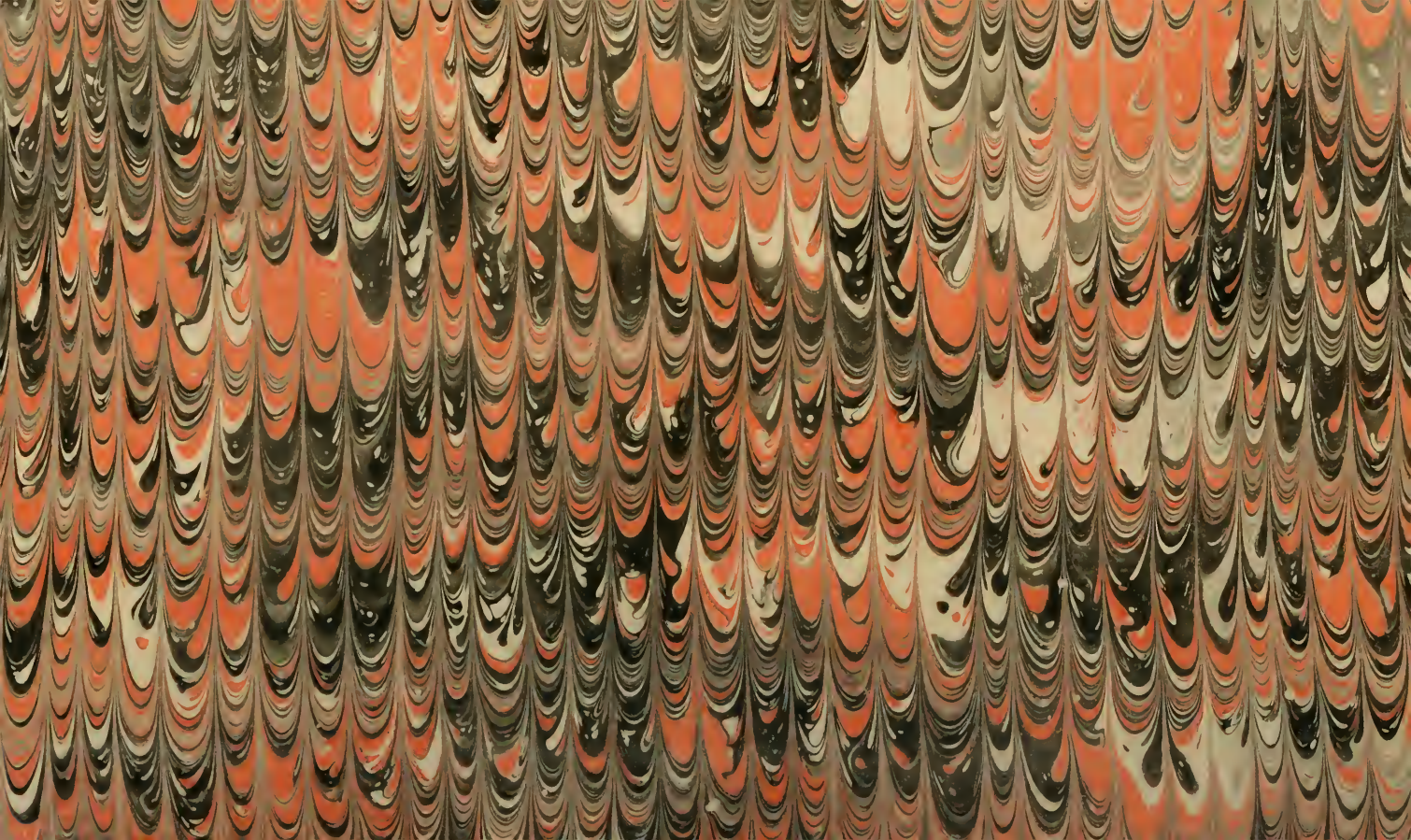

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ACCOUNT

OF THE

Conduct of the Miniſters

With Relation to the

PEERAGE-BILL:

IN A

LETTER to a Friend in the Country.

Sero ſapiunt Phryges.

LONDON:

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TO THE READER.

I *Muſt obſerve, that the following Letter was written about Four Months agoe, in Complyance to the Curioſity of a Private Gentleman, who has been ſome Years a Stranger to the Town. This will appear, from ſeveral Paſſages, to a candid Reader: And if he deſires to know how it comes to be now made Publick; I muſt Anſwer, that it is wholly owing to the Hopes many have, That the Peerage-Bill, which failed laſt Year in the Hands of the Miniſtry, may take Effect in the preſent Seſſion: A Benefit which I had deſpaired of ever ſeeing Twice offered to a Headſtrong People.*

To this Letter is added, by way of Appendix, a Paper which was Publiſhed laſt Year, with an Intention to moderate the unreaſonable Vehemence of the Perſons, who

opposed a Design, they had never cooly considered: Both which Pieces together may furnish the Reader with such Reflections as may incline him, on this and other Occasions, to think Twice, before he determines to pronounce his Opinion in Matters relating to the Welfare or Detriment, of the whole Community.

SIR,

London, Auguſt 10, 1719.

SIR,

SINCE, for your private Satisfaction, you deſire to know my impartial Sentiments of the Peerage-Bill, which made ſo great a Noiſe towards the Cloſe of the laſt Seſſion of Parliament; as likewiſe to be informed of the Reaſons for dropping it in the Houſe of Lords, when it ſeem'd to be heartily eſpouſed by the Miniſters; I ſhall comply with your Requeſt in as few Words as poſſible, without offering to embarras you with the Multiplicity of Arguments and Sophiſtry, uſed as well in favour of, as in Oppoſition to the Bill.

It is not without Reaſon that you complain of the Perplexity of the Queſtion,

ſtion, as it has been handled on both ſides in Print; ſince, in my Opinion, neither of the Parties concerned have thoroughly underſtood the Matter in Debate; or, at leaſt, they have very artfully concealed their Knowledge. But, there are certain Seaſons of Time, in which it is very difficult to write or to read without Prejudice: And, were the ſame Authors to take the ſame Subject into their Conſideration in the dead, unprofitable Seaſon of the Vacation from Buſineſs, when the Tide of Intereſt is at the loweſt Ebb, they would, probably, reaſon quite differently, and the Reader would judge of their Reaſons after a different manner.

In Complyance with the firſt part of your Demand, I ſhall obſerve, that the material Conſiderations relating to the intended Peerage-Bill, lie in a very narrow compaſs; and that there is no End of rambling after Suppoſitions and Surmizes. Did the Bill tend to the Good or to the Detriment of the Conſtitution

in

in General? Would it have confirmed or ſubverted the Liberties of the People? Would it have prevented the future Abuſe of the Prerogative in Creating Peers? Would it have diminiſhed the Privileges of the Commoners, or have given any new Power to the Lords? Would it have tended naturally to ſettle, or to unſettle the Minds of Self-intereſted and Ambitious Men? And, laſtly, were the Evils apprehended, as probable and as numerous, as the Advantages hoped for from the Bill? Theſe are the proper Queſtions, which a Lover of his Country ſhould have put to himſelf on this Occaſion: and not, whether the Bill was agreeable or diſagreeable to the Perſons, who are entruſted with the Management of our Affairs.

If then, Sir, upon a Review of the principal Arguments, urged from the Right and the Left in this Controverſy, you will catechize your ſelf after this manner; I make no doubt, but you will have

have more Reaſon, than ever, to wiſh the Peerage-Bill had taken Effect. Having thus let you into the Method of judging, by which I determin'd my own Opinion in this Pamphlet-Scuffle; I need not give my ſelf the Trouble of recapitulating the oppoſite Reaſons, with which the Preſs daily teemed: you have the ſeveral Pieces and Papers, and you have leiſure to ſort the Arguments, and weigh them one by one: Remembring ſtill, that one evident ſubſtantial Reaſon will outweigh a Thouſand precarious Surmizes caſt into the oppoſite Ballance.

I come now to the Second Part of your Enquiry, which is more intricate than the former. Nevertheleſs, I believe, I ſhall be able to account for the Abortiveneſs of this Bill, which to you and your Neighbours ſeemed very deſirable in many Reſpects.

Firſt then; Let us ſuppoſe the Project of the Peerage-Bill to have been good and advantageous to the Community; and that it manifeſtly appeared in this

this Light at firſt to the Men of Penetration. This Conſideration alone was ſufficient to raiſe a powerful Oppoſition againſt it from two different Parties. You know, the Enemies of the preſent Government are not few in Number; and it is always to be expected from ſuch a Faction, that they will be induſtrious to raiſe a Clamour to obſtruct all Deſigns that may tend to the Good of the Subject, and the Glory of the Prince; that ſo the Proteſtant Succeſſion (as far as lies in their Power) may ſeem to be no mighty Bleſſing even to a Proteſtant Nation. But, beſides the Forces from this Quarter, who took up Arguments againſt the Bill, there came in a conſiderable Body of Allies to aſſiſt them, not upon the Principle of Diſaffection to the Government, but out of Hatred to the preſent Miniſters. I believe it may be truly ſaid, there never was a Miniſtry, whoſe Adverſaries were not more induſtrious to overthrow them, than their Friends were vigilant and zealous to ſup-

port them: And this may be affirmed more notoriouſly of our preſent Stateſmen; becauſe a late Defection has not a little contributed to encourage their Adverſaries, and to diſhearten their Friends. Now again, ſuppoſing the intended Bill to have been a Maſter-ſtroke in ſound Politicks; do we not know the unreaſonable Reſentments of angry Courtiers ſufficiently, to be perſuaded, that they will not ſcruple to obſtruct any Advantage to the Publick, which they think may turn to the Honour and Eſtabliſhment of a Set of Men, whoſe Employments they covet?

In the Second Place, I am to inform you, that many Perſons, well intentioned to the Government, and amongſt them, ſeveral who entertained a favourable Opinion of the Miniſtry, were Strongly Prepoſſeſſed againſt the Bill, even before they knew one Clauſe in it. It was Eaſy to obſerve the mighty and ſudden Ferment, which on this Occaſion was raiſed throughout the Town:

By

By which Artifice, Hundreds of warm, ſuperficial Reaſoners were drawn in to declare themſelves openly againſt the Bill in the moſt poſitive manner; and thereby ſo far to engage their Honour and their Judgment, that they could not retract, nor even moderate their Aſſertions, without incurring the Suſpicion of having trafficked with ſome Court-Brokers. Others (no doubt) joined in the prevailing Outcry, becauſe they imagined their Ambitious Deſires were in Danger to be precluded: And ſome, perhaps, who could have no Hopes of being Lords Themſelves, were influenced by certain Perſons, who feared they might loſe the Perquiſites of procuring Titles for ſuch as were willing to pay any Price for them.

To theſe Obſtructions it will be proper to add; That ſeveral Things happened, not long before the Bill was brought into the Houſe of Lords, with which many Zealous Friends of the Government were not a little diſſatisfyed,

and for which in their Hearts they reproached the Miniſtry; and conſequently were the more ready to diſcourage them in their new Project. Neither had the Miniſters condeſcended to adviſe with their Friends concerning their Scheme: whereas, in an Affair of ſo great Importance, it had been prudent to obviate their Surprize, and to prepare their Minds, ſo as to ſecure their Aſſent by proper Reaſons: An Overſight, which the Adverſaries of the Bill made no ſmall Advantage of, by inſinuating, that there muſt be ſome latent Miſchief in the Deſigns of our Stateſmen, from the great Secrecy, which appeared in their Proceedings.

Now, Sir, I doubt not, but you will think theſe concurring Circumſtances were ſufficient to ſtifle the moſt hopeful Project in a divided Nation, in this Age of Corruption; when moſt Men in their different Parties, act by the Motives of either Paſſion or Intereſt. But, there were yet more Difficulties, which con-

contributed to this ſhameful Defeat; ſome of which I ſhall briefly mention for your further Satisfaction. Some of the moſt noted *Tories* (for what Reaſons they beſt know) declared for the Bill; which made ſeveral well meaning *Whigs* ſuſpect their was ſome ſiniſter Deſign at the Bottom. There was likewiſe too great a Majority in the Houſe of Lords for it; which alone greatly encreaſed the Jealouſy of the Commons; and this very Argument was artfully urged by all the Oppoſers of the Bill. Beſides, never was any Propoſal ſo ill timed: at that very Juncture, we were threatned, and very much allarmed with an Invaſion from *Spain*: And the general Opinion was, that it was the moſt perverſe Management to give a Handle of debating and wrangling amongſt our ſelves, when we ſtood in Danger of a Foreign Enemy, who depended on the Strength and Aſſurances of a Number of our own diſſaffected People.

All theſe Conſiderations, put together, make me (who have no great Faith in Stateſmen) apt to imagine, That the Miniſters themſelves were not ſo ſincere and earneſt in the Work, as they ſeemed to be: Wherefore elſe theſe manifeſt Overſights in the Conduct of this mighty Affair? They might (for ought we know) offer it only as a ſeemingly Popular and diſintereſted Bill; or perhaps to free Themſelves from the Importunities of many Commoners, that inſiſted upon coming into the Upper Houſe, for their Services in the Lower. You, who have waſted the moſt active ſeaſon of your Life about the Court, will not think thoſe Surmizes extravagant: And for my Part, I ſhall not be abſolutely convinced of the Sincerity of the Miniſtry in this Particular, till ſuch Time as they reſume the Bill, and concert their Meaſures better, to make it Effectual: For which Service they would highly merit the Thanks of every Honeſt, Unambitious *Engliſhman*; ſince ſuch an Act of Par-

Parliament (I am with you perſuaded) would prove the greateſt Security to our Genuine and Antient Conſtitution; and the giving of the Royal Aſſent to it would be not only the greateſt, but the wiſeſt Inſtance of Condeſcention and Goodneſs, that ever came from the Throne.

I am, SIR,

Your moſt Affectionate

and moſt Obedient Servant,

S. T.

The

THE

MODERATOR

IN THE

Preſent Controverſy

Relating to the

PEERAGE BILL.

-------- Hinc ſemper Ulixes
Criminibus terrere novis hinc ſpargere Voces
In vulgum ambiguas -------- Virg.

I Have heard and I have read (I believe) every Argument, that has been urged on both Sides in the general Debates on the Peerage Bill: And, becauſe the Diſputants of either Party ſeem to give themſelves up to Prepoſſeſſions, and to diſregard the Rules of fair reaſoning

reaſoning (no uncommon Overſight in Controverſies about Affairs of State) I hope it will not be taken amiſs, if I attempt to ſuggeſt ſome Conſiderations, which may enable them to canvaſs the Queſtion like Logicians; unleſs the contending Patriots ſhould think, that Impartiality may warp the Judgment of Politicians.

I. Let popular Clamour (which ever way it drives) be thrown out of the Argument, ſince it veers like the Wind, and may be influenced by many open and ſecret Methods: Then, it is as often known to blow full againſt Truth, as in the Teeth of Error.

II. Let the Approbation of a Court be likewiſe thrown out of the Argument; for when a Project ſeems to be countenanced by a Miniſtry, may not the Oppoſition raiſed againſt it be ſuppoſed to proceed as naturally from ill Will towards the Miniſters, as from good Will towards the Publick? more eſpecially

ſince the late notorious Diviſions amongſt the Whiggs.

III. Every Propoſal which has the Appearance of Novelty, is at firſt received with great Partiality; whereas in time (if no Artifices are uſed) it generally loſes or gains in the Opinions of honeſt Men, according to its intrinſick Merit.

IV. A new Propoſal is apt to awaken our Hopes and our Fears, according as it is repreſented: But with this Difference, that our Fears (when we are in no deſperate Condition) are much ſtronger than our Hopes; and that it is much eaſier to alarm us with Apprehenſions of Inconveniencies, than to quiet us with the Proſpect of Advantages.

Having thrown theſe Reflections in the way to hinder the Parties concerned from arguing hereafter on full Speed, I proceed to ſome Obſervations on the Management of the preſent Debate.

I. Moſt of the Arguments on both Sides, diſintereſtedly conſidered, are but Surmiſes, a ſort of Syllogiſtical Predictions

ons. The Combatants againſt the Bill ſuggeſt Fears and diſmal Apprehenſions; thoſe for the Bill ply us with Hopes and comfortable Conſequences; and both ſeem to proceed upon Probability in their Surmiſes. But then, we are not aware, how we ſuffer our Reaſon to be over-born by an improbable Fear, againſt a probable Hope.

II. Hence, by artfully engaging Men by the ſtronger Paſſion, when this Controverſy was firſt ſet on Foot; the Volunteers againſt the Bill came in readily; and appearing much ſuperior to their Antagoniſts in Number, triumphed with little Oppoſition.

III. When the Debate was moved from the Coffee-houſes to the Preſs, the Oppoſers of the Bill waſted the firſt Paper, and gained a ſecond Triumph; till the Minority thus ſhamefully baffled, at laſt took Courage and made a Stand with no ill Succeſs, conſidering they had loſt the Advantage of the firſt, and even ſecond Blow.

From theſe Remarks, one may ſuſpect, that the Arguments for the Bill will not for the preſent meet with fair Play without Doors, becauſe they were generally condemned before they were known. The laſt Appeal therefore for Equity muſt be to the Houſe of Commons; where the Hopes, the Fears, the white and the black Surmiſes, will find Admittance on the ſame Day; and each have a Hearing interchangeably.

If Surmiſes be allowed to paſs for Proofs, whether the Number of Peers be limited, or remains unlimited, there may on both Sides, be Suppoſitions of a forbidding Aſpect ſtarted with ſeeming Probability; as it happens in all important Caſes, where there is a Scope for Invention, and much may be plauſibly urged on either Hand. Thus it was in the laſt Bill relating to the Diſſenters; and thus in the Arguments for and againſt reducing the Forces; the latter of which, it was eaſy to foreſee, would

prove

prove a very unthrifty Expedient for ſaving the publick Money.

The preſent Queſtion has been ſplit into ſo many Conſiderations by both Parties, that it cannot clearly be decided, but by ſtripping it of leſs material Inquiries, till the principal Point is firſt determined. Now the principal Point to be conſidered is, Whether the Conſtitution will be endangered more manifeſtly hereafter, by leaving the Peerage intirely unlimited, or by limiting it under proper Reſtrictions. Herein lies the whole Streſs of the Debate; and to avoid running it into a tedious Argument, and into Subtilties, which only perplex the Judgment; it is plain, that if the Crown goes on to augment the Number of Peers, the Conſtitution will in a few Years more be manifeſtly indangered, if not ſubverted: But on the other Hand, it is not plain, that if the Number of Peers be limited, that the Conſtitution will be either manifeſtly endangered or ſubverted hereafter, by Means of the

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Limitation: The Concluſion thereof, which follows, is that by limiting the Number of Peers, a poſitive Evil will be prevented, and no poſitive Evil (unleſs Surmiſes can be poſitive) is urged againſt a Limitation.

Since I have taken upon me to be only a *Moderator* in this Controverſy, I ſhall detain the Reader but with two Reflections more, which have in them no Intricacy, and are proper to moderate the Opinions of thoſe, who deſire to judge impartially of the Conſequences of paſſing or rejecting the Bill now in Agitation.

As ſoon as the Houſe of Lords went upon taking into their Conſideration the State of the Peerage, and the intended Bill thereupon became the Subject of Converſation every where; How warmly did moſt Gentlemen talk againſt it? Every Man's Paſſion betrayed the ſecret Ambition of his Heart, and manifeſted the ſtrong Deſire the Commoners univerſally have of becoming Peers. Is it not

not then time, nay, Is it not abſolutely neceſſary to check, and even to kill this growing Humour? And this (I believe) cannot be effectually done by any other Expedient, but by properly limiting the Number of Peers.

Laſtly, While this Humour prevails, I need not labour to prove, that many of the wealthy Members, and the young aſpiring Gentlemen in the Houſe of Commons, will in all their Views be perpetually puſhing up to the Houſe of Lords; and conſequently may be eaſily biaſſed in Affairs which ought to be their principal Care; for it has, and will hereafter often come to paſs, that aſſerting the Rights and Privileges and Intereſts of the People, is not the moſt infallible Method of obtaining a Peerage.

FINIS.